

PROGRAM Newsnight

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NOT TO PROCEED WITH SLANDER SUIT

JULIAN BARBER: "Attorneys for the plaintiff today sought to question a self-declared CIA agent who's accused of slander in a suit filed in Federal Court in Baltimore. The attempt took place at a special pre-trial examination presided over by Judge Rosell Thompson, but the agent wasn't talking.

"Sam Donaldson has the story."

DONALDSON: "The United States Government, by way of an affidavit signed by Admiral William Rayborn, head of the CIA, today reaffirmed its insistence that to proceed with the slander suit brought against one of its agents would jeopardize national security.

"The agent, 39 year old Uri Rouse (?) of Hyattsville, Maryland, sat on the witness stand in Judge Rosell Thompson's Baltimore courtroom, while attorneys for the plaintiff, Eric Haine (?) tried to question him in the pre-trial examination.

"But to almost every question that had even a remote bearing on the case, government attorneys instructed Rouse not to answer. And Judge Thompson said the law required him to uphold their assertion that the witness should remain silent in the interest of national security.

"The CIA's own general counsel, Lawrence Houston, did allow Rouse to admit uttering the alleged slander. 'Yes', said Rouse when asked whether he had told the gathering of Estonian emigres in New York City in 1963, that Eric Haine was a dispatched agent of the KGB, the Soviet secret spy organization. 'I stated,' declared Rouse, 'that whoever does not believe what I said is free to contact the FBI.' But when Haine's attorneys attempted to discover Rouse's exact relationship to the CIA or FBI, how much he was paid for talking about him, who actually gave him the information to pass along. The government invoked its claim to secrecy.

"The man who brought the suit, Eric Haine, is like Rouse, a native of Estonia. Haine now lives in Canada. He denies any association with the Soviet Union and says he only wants to clear

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3 MAY
1966

his name."

MAN: "Uri Rouse at the orders of the CIA has said that you are a Soviet spy, or at least, in the early 60's you were a representative of the NKVD. You deny this?"

HAINÉ: "Completely. I deny it."

MAN: "Well, what basis of this charge could there be? Were you active in working the Estonian community in Canada and the United States?"

HAINÉ: "I was active there, but why these accusations were brought forward, I have not the slightest idea."

MAN: "Well, what were you telling the Estonian immigrants to this country and in Canada?"

HAINÉ: "to keep alive the idea of Estonian freedom and independence."

MAN: "When did you first meet Uri Rouse?"

HAINÉ: "I believe it was 1961 when he invited me to speak in an official category (?) in Lakewood, that's by New York."

MAN: "What was your subject?"

HAINÉ: "Resistance in Estonia against the Communist rule and the Communists."

DONALDSON: "In the normal slander case, truth in the absence of malice would be a defense, but the government having admitted the words claimed to be slanderous were uttered at its order has no intention of trying to prove them, it simply declares that Rouse was acting for the CIA, and states that to say anything more would be against the best interests of the United States on security grounds.

"So the government has asked the court to enter a summary judgment against the plaintiff, Eric Haine, and dismiss the suit. Arguments on that motion have been set for May 13th."